Mise en Scene

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The SWIFF Newsletter, Chennai

TO LIFE, LIGHT AND LONGEVITY

The 5th Samsung Women's International Film Festival (SWIFF) opened with a pleasant optimism as rare only be expected of a festival of this caliber. A matter reflection, a time for celebration and most importantly a time for understanding - this was the thread that echoed through the inaugural address by Dr. Nathi Safier, Director- SWIFF and Director- Inko Centre. Having successfully brought the SWIFF to its 5th edition in Chennai, Dr. Jafer detailed the list of participating countries and films; shorts, features and documentaries and thanked the curators who made it possible.

The Chief Guest for the evening actor and activist Gautami, lit the traditional lamp and proceeded to say a few words on what a milestone the SWIFF has achieved.

"But this festival would not have been possible without the main supporter Samsung Electronics was duly acknowledged and special mentions went out to all the cultural partners: The Consulate General of the United States of America, Embassy of Finland, Embassy of Denmark,The Goethe Institut, The British Council, Kalakshetra Foundation, Rajah Lakshmi Foundation, Hajila, The Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT), Documentary Educational Resource (DER), Amrose Films, The Prasanna Trust, Apparao Galleries, The Hilling Lens, L v Prasad Academy, Loyola College and Associate Partners: Taj Club House (Hospitality Partner), Space Jet (Travel Partner), Chennai Live 104.8 FM Radio Partner), Landmark (Retail) and Event (Event Management).

The core idea that seeks addressal : "what is a woman's film?" will be explored and every effort will be made to initiate in-depth discussions with film makers that stimulate viewers in the hope of achieving an enhanced understanding of the high's debatable definition of a woman's film.

The section of SWIFF sees 12 powerful engaging films from India, Koreas and from 4 countries around the world. discussions with international curators from Korea, India, the UK, the Netherlands, Delhi, Iran and Mexico. Interactions with national and international directors, a very special screening of the films selected for the Network of Asian Film Festivals (NAWIFF) Award, the NAWIFF Award ceremony and The Empathetic Eye: a unique photographic exhibition of the works of three of the world's finest photo-journalists curated by Travelling Lens and presented in association with Apparao Galleries, in addition to workshops and screenings at other venues.

Dr. Jafer concluded her speech telling the delegates that despite having received several requests to move the festival to Mumbai and Delhi, she resists as this is Chennai's own festival. The team at SWIFF aims to create a festival that will only keep getting better with every edition. A festival so powerful that will have undaunted visitors taking back a whole lot more than mere eyeful cinema.

Malavika Vinod

The Empathetic Eye

A photo exhibition curated by Travelling Lens, presented in association with Apparao Galleries. The exhibition features the work of Jim Webb, Maggie Steber and Antonio Olmos, distinguished photojournalists who have inspired millions around the world with the power of photography. They have won prestigious awards such as the Pulitzer Prize, World Press Photo, Visa d'Or and Robert Capa Gold Medal for their moving work.

TIME:11:00 - 18:00 hrs
DATE:17th - 31st July 2012
VENUE: Apparao Galleries

The exhibition will be inaugurated by Padma Shri Shobana Chandrakumar, renowned National Award winning art and production designer on the 17th of July.

SPOTLIGHT

NAWIFF 2012 Award presentation

The Network of Asian Film Festivals (NAWIFF) along with the International Women's Film Festivals in Korea, Japan and Taiwan was founded with a vision to empower women filmmakers in Asia, by providing a platform for exhibition and distribution. The NAWIFF award was held in April 2010, in a quest to connect filmmakers in Asia, drawing from a list recommended by NAWIFF member countries. The selected films are shown at several festivals and have the opportunity to travel across Asia. The NAWIFF 2010 award went to the feature film Ashamanthen Unday Kadale Lokame. NAWIFF 2011 was hosted alongside the Tokyo International Women's Film Festival in October 2011 and Shalini Ahmedan Leena Manimekalai's Tengadhi won the NAWIFF 2011 award. The NAWIFF 2012 Award presentations will take place at the 5th SWIFF in Chennai on 17th July.

5th SWIFF

SAMSUNG WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL Film Festival

InKo

Gender versus Space

What Sameera Jain attempts in her docu-drama 'Mera Apna Shahar' or 'My Own City' is to explore the underlying dynamics between gender and space. The idea of the all-pervading 'gaze' also comes under the spotlight. The film encapsulates one's experiences in a city where the look and voice come under constant surveillance. Eventually, surveillance turns against itself and what follows is an untainted representation of the gender negotiating with the space.

Still from Mera Apna Shahar

Highly experimental in its approach, the film is an unfettered depiction of the city seen through the eye of a 'genderless' camera. The film opens with a common place scene of women at a bus stand. The camera follows the women of the Azad Driving School who are the students of a self-defense class. Through cataloguing the seemingly mundane activities like relaxing in a public garden, commuting in a city bus, et al, Jain points out how gender plays out in these urban spaces. In one of the most disturbing scenes, when a young woman walks alone late at night, everything is rather Shaken, she moves back. Sequences such as these form compelling images as they delve into the overarching concepts of gender bias and sexuality. While it lacks a verbal narrative, the rhythmic sequences reveal the story line.

Irony plays out through the entire movie and it translates the fact that the 'own-ness' of 'Mera Apna Shaher' is something that probably exists only in mind's psyche.

By Afshan Rajeev

Never Say Die

Keiko Isohara's film 3.11: In The Moment, primarily deals with the conflict between nature and human beings. At the outset, it is a representation of the lives of the victims affected by natural disasters in Fukushima and it goes on to enlighten viewers with a philosophical message on the approach towards life itself.

The camera moves through people's experiences after the disaster and further tells us how people moved on. As an audience, one witnesses how they overcome their tragedy and make their lives better with a positive outlook.

The movie preaches 'Never to surrender' and gives us a message on how to focus on the present rather than mourn over the past. On the flip side the movie is quite disturbing as it shows how everything can collapse in a moment. It depicts how normalcy and routines can easily be interrupted by the power of nature. It brings out the brim of life as man's consecution is followed by nature's destruction revealing the ultimate truth about the uncertainty of life. At the same time, the movie speaks on how to balance emotions and reality.

The camera moves to a different angle on the construction of a nuclear plant in Hiroshima and the subsequent disaster it caused. People struggle for survival as radiation permeates but per se just so the people of Tokyo may live in light. Shots capture people being re-exulted as their land and homes unfortunately turn into mere memories. The irony of development is subsequently questioned here.

In the wake of this tragedy, people come together and learn how to contribute to society and each other. Unto rescue goes them to rebuild their lives. This enables viewers to realize the importance of relationships which we have forgotten in the world today. To conclude, there is much to discuss, and observe if not on a different angle.

By Reema S Menon

Talking Heads

Discussion with Rosa Carrillo (Mexico), International Curator for films from Latin America.

1. What kind of films have you selected with specific reference to the region that you curated?

I select films with high cultural and social content, films that show the roots and identity of Latino-American countries. The film subjects are generally about the lives of women. They are usually new or classic productions directed by women which have been presented at the most recognized film festivals and have got awards and recognition; I try to select productions that have not previously been presented in any Dalit-a festival, because the audience likes to see new and different things.

2. What do you think is the role of film festivals? And what specifically do you think SWIFF contributed to?

These film festivals are multicultural events where filmmakers, directors, actors and producers from different countries converge, they exchange ideas and experiences through activities such as masterclasses, face to face, presentation of films and question and answer sessions (Q & A) as well as workshops that enrich and expand the knowledge of their cultural identity. SWIFF is such a space for filmmakers to present their works. At SWIFF, besides the before mentioned activities, the festival promotes and stimulates the participation of women.

3. What is the scenario of women filmmakers in the geographic area that you are focusing on?

The role of women in Latino- American cinema has changed, now they are stronger, more confident and more visible, but the large gender gap has not been shortened, making it difficult for them to succeed. Men still dominate the roles of direction, production, photography and script-writing and women's are relegated to tasks such as costumes, makeup and sometimes editing. However, today most American women's festivals, besides being spaces to present their audiovisual works, are organizing activities focused on gender equality so that women's rights can be recognized. Through cinema, we can raise awareness and educate people about this important topic.

Free, Safe: A Bit of Both

Desire, Pleasure, Safe, Unsafe, Comfort, Discomfort. Amidst these polarities, the constant factor in Sameera Jain's experimental film, 'Mera Apna Shahar (My Own City, in Hindi), is the gaze. Set in India's capital, which has also earned the moniker of being the crime centre of the country, sexuality and space call the shots throughout the film, its prime.

Director Sameera Jain introduces her film Mera Apna Shahar

Characters - underprivileged women – trundle along their day and lives trying to resist the onset of the restrictive and ever changing liberal landscape but being always aware and anxious of the threats and troubles it might throw up.

The film's pace – slow, unhurried – is also a stark reminder of the everyday-ness of existence in a big city; in the movement, there is also a monotony. Panning through the common sights and streets of Delhi, and steering clear of the glitz and glamour of the city in an almost obvious manner, the film locates itself in the lives of a few women who find liberation and, livelihood, thanks to the Azad Foundation (in Delhi) that trains women from the underprivileged sections of society to drive a four-wheeler through a six-month programme and promises them employment thereafter.

Yet, these young women are constantly being watched, looked at. They pass their cars outside their Madam's office and every time they need to answer the call of nature, they need to walk a full kilometer or

Symbolism is not another essential in the film. One of the sequences in the film is a continuous stride of awe itself – a safety cab, a cab, a shoe, flat, fast – while the voiceover is of a woman who instructs young girls in school about how to steer clear of male trouble in eating, bedtime.

Even though the film places the marginalized women in Delhi, it is in a sense, universal. As an urban young woman living in a city, I am removed from Delhi, in every sense of the word. I'm constantly conscious of my sexuality and the spaces where I'm located. Two hours after the film, as I went for a run on the road, with the film running through my head, I realized I was not unconscious of the gaze that followed me; I manoeuvred my way through it. Can they stand a day at the park without feeling the obvious presence of 'lecherous, prying eyes that remind them of their sexuality? It is these polarities that the film examines in a way that is neither exhortatory, nor bashing.

Anindita Ravishankar Nair

CULTURAMA

In conversation with Jennifer Montoya, the Consulate General of the United States in Chennai, about Freedomland cultural partners at the SWIFF 2012? Why did you think it was important to ally with this festival?

The U.S. Consulate takes pride in partnering with SWIFF and thanks the Inko Centre for the opportunity to participate the film festival. The U.S. Government has placed a priority on fostering women's rights into our foreign policy objectives, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has been an outstanding champion in advancing women's empowerment goals. Global initiatives like this one cannot be successful or sustainable by governments or organizations in isolation, and we welcome the opportunity to partner with organizations like the Inko Centre to work towards empowering all of our citizens.

2. How does the festival resonate with fulfilling your own cultural objectives?

The U.S. Consulate conducts a full range of public diplomacy programs including film screenings as well as participating in other Film festivals like the International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK) in the overall exposure, the Chennai International Film Festival (CIFF) and the Kochi Film Festival. We are pleased this festival provides a platform through which we can share American culture and art.

3. Please outline the initiatives in the 5th SWIFF in your partnership that if you consider a must attend for delegates.

I am impressed by the SWIFF's range of events and activities – from photo exhibits to discussion, artistry films and workshops. I would recommend delegates see as many things as possible.

4. As a cultural partner of SWIFF, how do you perceive the take away from the festival?

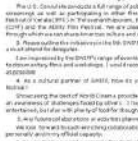
Showcasing the work of North Cinema provides viewers a range of perspectives and an awareness of challenges faced by other's. I hope audiences will come away not only entertained, but also with plenty of food for thought.

5. Any future collaborations or activities planned with SWIFF?

We look forward to such enriching collaborations especially as women to share both personally and in my official capacity.

6. Do you think we need women's film festivals in this world?

Yes of course. Art and culture provide yet another avenue for drawing attention to important issues like women's rights and empowerment — and such events also showcase the skills and talents of some of the world's finest artists. The U.S. and India have incorporated women's issues into all pillars of our strategic dialogue and managed to bring this discussion into our talks in another way in which our two countries can promote dialogue and public awareness of issues, in both a productive and diverse learning way.



Jennifer D. Montoya
U.S. Consul General

WATCH IT TODAY!

10AM hrs

Granny and Honey by Jasmine Ching-hui Lee

Granny and Honey is a heartwarming documentary that also how Eat one will gets seek lives an intimate portrayal of the lives of Mainland Chinese women and their children in unusual circumstances in Taiwan. Mainland mothers' voices several auditions on the bonds of human relationships. The female caregivers on the island look after the ageing residents' parents and thanks to close relationships and if you love and breath will their dreams come come true? The film also records the development of a unique female friendship, as the director turns into a messenger whose camera relays the feelings and thoughts of the migrant workers and their families back home.

12AM hrs — **Not Work by Wyong - 2011** — **2011 Korea**

This documentary offers an insight into women's bodies and labour in a time of global capitalism. Most women are excluded to the periphery of society, where they are labelled housewives, sex workers, disabled workers, migrant workers, those who are homeless and so on. In the marginalized world of women, their bodies have aspect of meaning. A woman's body becomes a means of labour, a tool or a commodity itself. At times when it is regarded as tainted, it is subjected to moral judgment. Real-World aims to document these women's bodies that expose these violence of global capitalism in the lowest places, thereby raising the question - 'can the perspective of women and labour - of what is meant in society for such lives).

DO NOT MISS:

Here's the line -up of films selected for the SWIFF 2012 Jury. The Fabulous films from Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Israel and India that we believe are not to be missed at the 5th SWIFF. These films have also been shortlisted for the NAWIFF award 2012.

1. **Sea + Ballad** by Umemura Yoshio
   10:15 Street
2. **Maria Apna Shahar** by Sameera Jain
   10:15 India
3. **3.11: In The Moment** by Keiko Isohara
   10:15 Street
4. **Pianogrand Harvey** by Jasmine Ching-hui Lee
   10:15 Taiwan
5. **Real Movie** by Hyung - soon
   10:15 Korea

Here Are Some Movies for Viewers Set